

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: December 20, 2012

Agenda Item: HD 455 Bighorn Sheep Hunt

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Approval of Proposed Rule

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

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Background

Bighorn sheep hunting was re-opened in HD 455 in 2005. The old hunt area encompassed the Beartooth Wildlife Management area and the Gates of the Mountains wilderness area. In 2005, the hunt area boundary was expanded to include the bighorn sheep herd south of the Cascade (Sheep Creek drainage). Hunters from 2005 to 2010 had excellent opportunities to harvest an older age class ram, with numerous rams in the population. A die-off during the winter of 2010 caused a 50-75% loss in the herd. The sheep license holder in 2011 hunted 30 days, harvesting a large full curl ram, but mentioned observing only a handful of ½ curl and older rams. The 2012 sheep licensed holder had a tough time finding rams this past fall. Area landowner and personal observations are similar. FWP proposes to close the HD 455 bighorn sheep hunt until sheep numbers rebound and older age class rams become available.

Public Involvement Process & Results

The public comment period for any adopted proposal will run through 5 PM Monday, January 28, with Final adoptions at the February 14 commission meeting in Helena.

Alternatives and Analysis

The change may be adopted as proposed, with adjustment, with additions, with deletions or no change from 2012 (status quo) as per staff justifications, public comment and/or Commission discussion.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

Given the observed population size, measured decline, poor hunting conditions, disease history, and guidance in the Bighorn Sheep Conservation Strategy, it is appropriate to close the hunt. FWP proposes and supports the closure.

Proposed Motion

I move the FWP Commission adopt the proposed closure of the HD 455 bighorn season as presented by FWP.